DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 042 831 UD 010 521

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TITLE Effects of Parent-Administered Summer Reading Instruction.
PUB DATE Mar 70
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the AERA Meeting, Minneapolis, Minn. March 2-6, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Gains, Directed Reading Activity, Home Study, *Kindergarten Children, Parental Background, *Parent Participation, Participant Involvement, Reading Achievement, Reading Instruction, Reading Materials, *Reading Programs, *Summer Programs
IDENTIFIERS *California, Southwest Regional Laboratory, Summer Reading Program, SWRL

ABSTRACT

The Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) has developed and initially field tested during summer 1969 a Summer Reading Program (SRP) designed to prevent the decrement in kindergarten children's academic achievement caused by the lack of instruction and practice during the summer. Each parent supervised his child at home in structured reading practice. The parents of 183 of the 244 kindergarten children in the SWRL First-Year Reading Program agreed to participate. Two schools in a third urban Southern California district were intentionally selected on a post facto basis to obtain a comparison group of 30 subjects . A package of structured guidelines for the parents and ten sets of pupil materials (one per week) were mailed to each participant. The guidelines explained the organization and schedule for the program and described specific procedures to be used by parents in applying the various materials. Sources of transactional and achievement data included the pretest and posttest for the program, the SRP Rating Sheet, and the Weekly Record Sheets. Post-summer achievement by the children was found to be higher than their pre-summer performance, an encouraging reversal of the normal trend. (JM)

ED042831

Paper Presented at the
Annual American Educational Research Association Meeting
Minneapolis, March 2-6, 1970

EFFECTS OF PARENT-ADMINISTERED SUMMER READING INSTRUCTION

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Educators have often noted that children's achievement in academic subjects drops during the summer months. Pre-summer and post-summer testing in 1968 with the Southwest Regional Laboratory's (SWRL) First-Year Communication Skills Program supported this observation, revealing a decline in reading achievement from late May in the children's kindergarten year (All subjects had received a full year of reading instruction in kindergarten) to early October in their first-grade year. The apparent primary reason for such achievement decrements is the lack of instruction and practice during the summer.

This paper describes an attempt to enable children to maintain their reading skills during the summer months. The 1969 summer tryout described in the paper was the initial field test of the SWRL Summer Reading Program (SRP), a program in which the parent supervises his child at home in structured reading practice. The major purpose of the tryout was to identify effective procedures for use with the parents and children so that these procedures could subsequently be incorporated into the program.

UD010521

[1]The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of Fred Niedermeyer, Masahito Okada, and David Shoemaker.

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Although the tryout was conducted primarily for formative-evaluation purposes, this paper emphasizes its summative aspects (i.e.; post-program performance, rather than subsequent revisions) to an equal or greater degree than formative issues.

METHOD

Subjects

Before the close of the school year in June, 1969, a letter that briefly explained the Summer Reading Program and invited parent-child participation in the program tryout was sent to the parents of 244 children who were just completing their kindergarten year. The subjects had participated in the SWRL First-Year Reading Program in kindergarten. They comprised the total kindergarten population of three schools representing two urban Southern California school districts. The parents of 183 of the 244 children (75%) indicated acceptance of the invitation to participate in the summer tryout.

Because of the anticipated parent response toward such a procedure, it was deemed inadvisable to randomly assign to the program some parents who agreed to participate while not assigning other parents to it (i.e.; withholding the program from some parents who had agreed to participate in the tryout). Instead, two schools in a third urban Southern California district were intentionally selected on a post facto basis to obtain a comparison group of subjects. The particular schools were selected because the random sample of kindergarten children who had been posttested in the two schools at the conclusion of the kindergarten tryout (The posttest for the kindergarten tryout served as the pretest

for the SRP) had achieved a similar mean pre-summer score to the summer pretest scores of the children who participated in the summer tryout on a regular basis. Thus, the 30 children in the comparison group had used the same reading program in kindergarten as the regular participants in SRP pretest, but they were not offered the opportunity to participate in the SRP tryout.

Materials and Procedures

During the week following the closing of school for the summer, a package of materials was mailed to the home address of each of the 183 participants. The package contained a 4-page set of structured guidelines for the parents and 10 cellophane-wrapped sets (one set per week) of pupil materials. The guidelines explained the organization and schedule for the program and described specific procedures to be employed by the parent in using the various materials with his child.

The 10-week program was organized on a weekly basis. The weekly schedule called for use of specified materials and procedures on each of four days with each day's activities designed to require from 10-15 minutes total time. Materials for each week included a sheet of three exercises (called Practice Exercises) designed to provide practice on the reading content covered by the children in kindergarten, a storybook containing two stories, a Weekly Record Sheet consisting of a short assessment exercise and an activity checklist to be marked by the parent, and an animal poster to be given to the child after he had completed all activities for the week. During the 10-week program, the Practice

Exercises and storybooks provided practice on all objectives and content of the children's kindergarten program except for the word-attack objective of sounding out new words. Practice on this skill was deleted because of the relative difficulty for parents to master the appropriate procedures for use with the children.

Sources of Data

Sources of transactional and achievement data included the pretest and posttest for the program, the SRP Rating Sheet, and the Weekly Record Sheets.

The pretest and posttest were comparable forms of the First Year Test. This 50-item instrument contains 25 selected-response items and 25 constructed-response items assessing pupil performance on the objectives and content of the kindergarten program. The pretest was individually administered at school in June, 1969, before the close of the subjects' kindergarten year. The posttest was administered at school in September , 1969, at the beginning of the subjects' first-grade year following the summer tryout of the SRP. KR-21 reliability coefficients for the two test forms, computed on 127 subjects tested with each form, were .91 and .92.

The Weekly Record Sheet was employed for two purposes. It was intended as a device that would build in parent accountability to SWRL for completing the program activities. Consequently, parents were requested to complete the activity checklist on this form each week and to mail the form to SWRL. Secondly, the checklist served as an activity log that enabled SWRL staff to determine the relationship between amount of participation in the program and pupil performance.

The SRP Rating Sheet was designed to assess parent attitudes toward the program and to obtain parent suggestions for improvements in the program. A copy of the rating sheet was mailed at the close of the summer tryout to all participating parents.

RESULTS

Parent Participation

As a part of the tryout, the parent was requested to complete and return to SWRL for each of the 10 weeks a Weekly Record Sheet indicating the activities completed by his child during that week. It seems highly probable that the number of Weekly Record Sheets received from the parent provides the most accurate indication of the extent to which the parent and his child actually did participate in the program. The number of record sheets returned by the 183 participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals that 127 of the 183 children whose parents initially indicated a desire to participate in the tryout returned 6 or more Weekly Record Sheets. However, the fact that parents of 56 of the children submitted 5 or less record sheets suggests that there was relatively little participation by many parents and their children. Almost without exception on the returned record sheets, the parent indicated that his child had completed every activity for the week.

Pupil Achievement

Individual testing with the 50-item criterion test was scheduled for the pretest on a single day in June at each school and for the posttest on a single day in September. No second attempt was made to test any child who was absent on either the scheduled pretesting or posttesting day at

his school. The mean pretest and posttest scores for regular participants, irregular and non-participants who accepted the initial offer to participate, and the no-treatment comparison group are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals that the mean score of the 95 pretested and posttested participants whose parents returned 6-10 completed WRS's increased by 2.8 points (from 38.0 to 40.8) during the summer months, while the mean score of the comparison group decreased by 3.0 points (40.4 to 37.4). The mean pre-summer score of the irregular participants was only 28.0, and their posttest mean of 27.2 represented a slight drop over the summer months.

The data in Table 2 were analyzed for statistical significance using a one-way analysis of covariance. Pretest scores served as the covariate. Because of the marked difference in size between the "regular participants" cell and the other two groups coupled with a non-hemogeneity of variance problem, subjects were randomly deleted from the "regular participants" cell to reduce its size from 95 to 32. The obtained F-ratio of 8.90 is statistically significant at the .001 level of confidence. Multiple-comparison tests revealed significant differences between the regular participants and the comparison group ($p < .01$) and between the regular participants and irregular participants ($p < .01$). Significant differences were also obtained between each pair of groups listed above when the analysis was performed using the total n of 95 for the "regular participants" group.

The data were examined further to check for trends related to the pretest achievement level of the subjects. The comparison group was divided into three groups of 10 each based on pretest scores (top 1/3, middle 1/3 and bottom 1/3 in pretest achievement). The 32 subjects

in the random sample of regular participants were also classified into one of three groups with the basis for classification being the same pretest scores as were used in categorizing the comparison group. Figure 1 shows the mean pretest and posttest performance by pretest achievement level for the regular participants and the comparison group.

Figure 1 reveals that there was little change in the achievement level of the top students in either group during the summer. However, the mean score of regular participants in the middle group increased approximately 2 points from pretest to posttest, while the mean score of the middle group of children in the comparison group dropped 5 points. Similarly, the mean score of the low group of regular participants increased approximately 4 points and the mean of the low group of comparison subjects dropped nearly 4 points. It seems clear from these data that regular participation in the program is of particular value to average and low-achieving students.

Criterion test results also revealed an interesting relationship between pretest scores and amount of participation in the program. Pretest and posttest scores were obtained for a total of 154 children. These individuals can be classified as follows into three groups by amount of participation.

Participation level	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean
6-10 WRS's returned	95	38.0	40.8
0-5 WRS's returned	32	28.0	27.2
Invited, but did not	27	25.6	24.6

Note that as a group the subjects who maintained regular participation in the program (i.e., 6-10 WRS's returned) were better readers initially, as revealed by their substantially higher pretest mean score. The groups of subjects who participated irregularly or did not participate at all were the lower achieving groups initially. This is particularly unfortunate because the available data suggest that regular participation in the program has the greatest beneficial effect on the performance of lower-achieving students.

DISCUSSION

The results of the 1969 tryout of the SRP were generally positive and offer hope for further development of summer instructional programs for home use. It is encouraging that post-summer achievement by the children was higher than their pre-summer performance, since this represents a reversal of the normal trend. Parent responses to the SRP Rating Sheet revealed highly favorable attitudes toward the program and indicated that the parents would like to participate in a similar program next summer. These parental reactions also represent a positive aspect of the tryout.

Less encouraging is the fact that poorer readers did not participate in the tryout to the extent that better readers did. It seems likely that the relative lack of participation by the poorer readers is associated with the tendency for lower-achieving parents (i.e., lower achieving as defined by socioeconomic and education level) to offer less encouragement and reward for school achievement and participation in academic activities than high-achieving parents. That is, the lower-achieving parents are more likely to have lower-achieving children initially and are less likely

to enroll them in programs such as the summer tryout or to encourage continued participation when participation is a matter of free choice. Another possible reason that some parents of poorer readers did not participate regularly after initial enrollment is that they or the children may have become discouraged because the children did not do too well on the program activities. Their discouragement or frustration may have caused them to drop out of the program.

The major purpose of the SRP tryout was to identify revisions that would improve the effectiveness in the Summer Reading Program. Comments and suggestions offered by parents on the SRP rating sheet have led to several minor revisions, including the scheduling of activities on only three days per week instead of four days. However, since the data reveal that lower-achieving children who participated regularly in the program made important gains in achievement, it appears highly probable that the most effective possible improvement would be to increase the amount of participation by such children and their parents. In an attempt to accomplish this admittedly difficult task, several revisions are being incorporated into the program to encourage regular participation. The initial letter to parents, which contains an acceptance/rejection tear sheet to be returned to the school, will be modified to stress the program's positive results in the 1969 tryout and to indicate that participation may affect the child's reading placement in Grade 1. Brief, positive letters will also be sent to all parents on two or three occasions during the tryout. The intent of these letters will be to reinforce regular participants by indicating the positive effects of regular participation and to encourage participation by parents who are not participating regularly. Other

modifications currently being considered are (1) the withholding of the materials for the last several weeks until the Weekly Record Sheets for the first few weeks have been completed and returned, and (2) charging parents at cost for use of the program, a procedure which will eventually be necessary in any case. Hopefully, it will be possible with the revisions to maintain an inexpensive program that improves learner achievement during the summer, while at the same time substantially increasing regular participation by the parents and children.

Handout to accompany -

[1]EFFECTS OF PARENT-ADMINISTERED SUMMER READING INSTRUCTION

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TABLE 1

NUMBER OF WEEKLY RECORD SHEETS RETURNED BY PARENTS

WRS's Returned	No. of Parents	WRS's Returned	No. of Parents
10	67	4	5
9	27	3	9
8	12	2	5
7	11	1	7
6	10	0	23
5	7	TOTAL	183

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TABLE 2

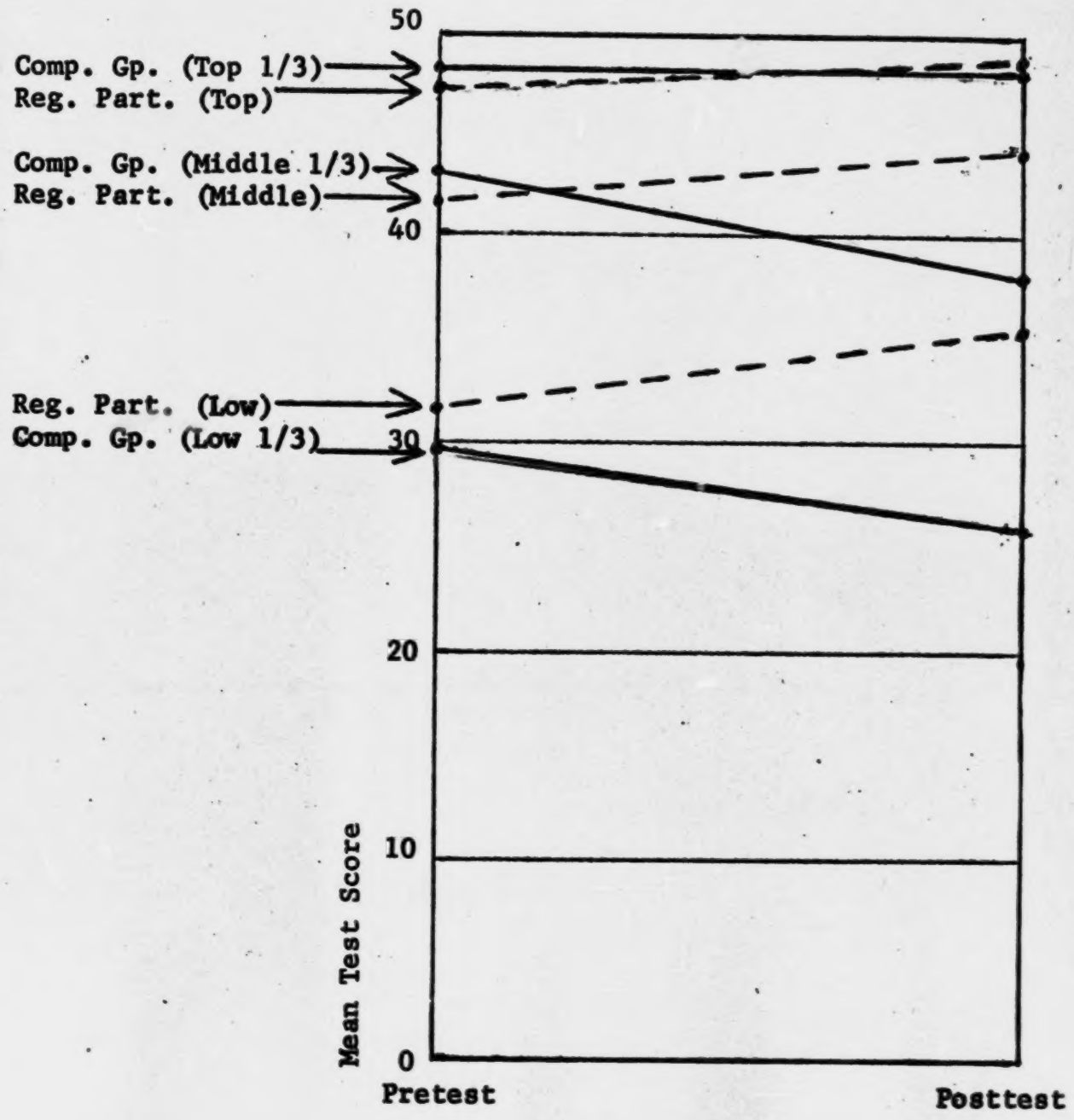
PRETEST AND POSTTEST MEAN SCORES FOR SUMMER-TRYOUT PARTICIPANTS AND COMPARISON GROUP

Group	N	Pretest Score	Posttest Score
Regular Participants (6-10 WRS's)	95	38.0	40.8
Comparison Group (no opportunity to participate)	30	40.4	37.4
Irregular and Non-Participants (Accepted offer to participate but submitted 0-5 WRS's)	32	28.0	27.2

[1]A paper presented at the 1970 annual convention of the American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, March 2-6, 1970.

FIGURE 1

PRETEST AND POSTTEST MEAN SCORES BY GROUP AND PRETEST ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL



Pretest Achievement Level	Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Difference
High	Regular Participants	47.8	48.5	.7
	Comparison	48.3	48.3	0.0
Middle	Regular Participants	42.2	44.3	2.1
	Comparison	43.1	38.1	-5.0
Low	Regular Participants	31.8	35.6	3.8
	Comparison	29.9	26.0	-3.9